

Message Text

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S E C R E T CAIRO 16327

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PFOR LE IS
SUBJECT: SADAT AND SOUTHERN LEBANON

REF: STATE 288024 (TOSEC 310021)

1. AFTER THANKING PRESIDENT SADAT FOR TAKING THE TIME TO MEET WITH OUR SIX RECENT CODELS, I CONVEYED TO HIM USG VIEWS ON PRESENT DELICATE SITUATION IN SOUTH LEBANON. IN DOING SO, I MADE ALL THE POINTS CITED PARA 1, REFTEL, AND INDICATED THAT THE SECRETARY WOULD WELCOME ANY THOUGHTS SADAT MIGHT HAVE ABOUT FURTHER STEPS THAT MIGHT BE TAKEN TO CONTRIBUTE TO SECURITY AND STABILITY IN SOUTH LEBANON AND TO CALM ALONG THE BORDER.

2. THE PRESIDENT LISTENED ATTENTIVELY AND NODDED APPROVINGLY WHEN I MENTIONED THAT (A) WE HAD BEEN IN TOUCH WITH BOTH THE ISRAELIS AND THE SYRIANS TO COUNSEL RESTRAINT AND (B) OUR CHARGE IN BEIRUT WILL ASK PRESIDENT SARKIS ABOUT WHAT MIGHT BE DONE TO BRING ORDER AND SECURITY TO THE SOUTHERN AREAS.

3. AFTER I HAD FINISHED MY PRESENTATION, SADAT OBSERVED THAT THIS IS INDEED A "DANGEROUS TIME" IN SOUTHERN LEBANON. HE EXPRESSED DEEP CONCERN THAT THE ISRAELIS MAY SEIZE UPON WHAT HE CALLED THE "TRANSITION OF POWER IN THE US" TO FURTHER THEIR OWN INTERESTS IN SOUTH LEBANON. HE IS AFRAID THEY WILL CONCLUDE THAT

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A "VACUUM" EXISTS WHICH THEY CAN EXPLOIT. HE URGED

THAT, AS HE PUT IT, WE CONTINUE TO "KEEP PRESSURE ON THE ISRAELIS UNTIL THE 20TH TO EXERCISE RESTRAINT."

4. SADAT ADDED THAT HE WILL SEND A MESSAGE TO PRESIDENT ASAD IN WHICH HE WILL RAISE THE DELICACY OF THE SOUTH LEBANESE SITUATION AND URGE ASAD TO DO WHAT HE CAN TO CALM IT. HE WAS CONVINCED THAT ASAD IS "NOT READY TO GAMBLE." NOTWITHSTANDING THE NAHARIYA ROCKET ATTACK, HE OPINED THAT THE PLO LEADERSHIP ALSO DOES NOT WANT TO ESCALATE THE SOUTH LEBANON SITUATION. IN MY PRESENCE, HE CALLED FOR PAPER AND DRAFTED A MESSAGE TO VP MUBARAK AND FAHMY, BOTH OF WHOM ARRIVE IN DAMASCUS TODAY, INSTRUCTING THEM TO DISCUSS THE SOUTH LEBANON SITUATION WITH ASAD AND URGE RESTRAINT. SINCE I NOTICED HE HAD NOT INCLUDED ANYTHING TO THE PLO, I REMINDED HIM THAT THE PALESTINIANS MUST ALSO BE TOLD IN STRONG TERMS NOT TO TAKE PROVOCATIVE ACTIONS. HE AGREED AND ADDED TO HIS MESSAGE INSTRUCTIONS THAT MUBARAK/FAHMY SHOULD ALSO COMMUNICATE WITH THE PLO ALONG THESE LINES.

5. FROM THE US SIDE, SADAT REPEATEDLY URGED THAT WE CONTINUE TO PRESS THE ISRAELIS NOT TO EXPLOIT THE SITUATION. I TOLD HIM OUR ADVISE IS NOT LIKELY TO BE HEEDED IF THE PALESTINIANS MOUNT ATTACKS ON ISRAEL FROM SOUTH LEBANON OR THE ARQUB. HE AGREED, BUT ARGUED THE ISREALIS ARE THEMSELVES RESPONSIBLE FOR MUCH OF THE TENSION THAT NOW PREVAILS IN SOUTH LEBANON. THEY INITIATED ARTILLERY BARRAGES AGAINST SOUTHERN LEBANESE VILLAGES.

6. RE SARKIS, SADAT DOUBTED THE LEBANESE PRESIDENT HAS THE CAPABILITY TO DEPLOY SUFFICIENT INDIGENOUS SECURITY FORCES IN SOUTH LEBANON AND ARQUB TO PREVENT PROVOCATIVE BORDER INCIDENTS. SARKIS, HE OBSERVED, HAS NO MILITARY FORCES OF HIS OWN. NOTING SARKIS IS NOT A STONG POLITICIAN AND LACKS A POWER BASE OF HIS OWN, HE THOUGH SARKIS WILL PROBABLY BE AFRAID THAT THE PALESTINIANS MIGHT TURN AGAINST HIM. HE SUGGESTED, HOWEVER, THAT WE EMPHASIZE TO SARKIS CONTINUED USG SUPPORT FOR THE TERRITORIAL INTEGRITY AND POLITICAL INDEPENDENCE OF LEBANON AND OF

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OUR READINESS TO HELP IN EVERY FEASIBLE WAY. (I TOLD THE PRESIDENT THAT DEPT PRESS SPOKESMAN HAD JUST REITERATED OUR SUPPORT FOR THE TERRITORIAL INTEGRITY AND POLITICAL INDEPENDENCE OF LEBANON.) WE COULD ALSO TELL SARKIS THAT SADAT IS DOING HIS BEST WITH THE PALESTINIANS AND THAT THE LEBANESE AUTHORITIES SHOULD NOT DO ANYTHING THAT MIGHT GIVE THE ISRAELIS ANY PRETEXT TO ACT AGAINST SOUTH LEBANON. WE SHOULD GIVE SARKIS AN ASSURANCE THAT WE

WILL NOT PERMIT THE ISRAELIS TO TAKE UNILATERAL ACTION
AGAINST SOUTH LEBANON SO LONG AS RESTRAINT IS SHOWN IN
THAT AREA. FINALLY, HE URGED THAT WE USE OUR INFLUENCE
WITH SARKIS TO TAKE ACTION AS QUICKLY AS POSSIBLE IN
ORDER TO BRING ALL THE LEBANESE RPT LEBANESE PARTIES
TOGETHER. THE SOONER SARKIS DOES THIS, THE PRESIDENT
OPINED, THE MORE QUICKLY POLITICAL STABILITY WILL RETURN
TO LEBANON AND THE MORE DIFFICULT IT WILL BE FOR
REJECTIONIST PALESTINIANS TO SEEK TO MAKE TROUBLE.
SADATHOUGHT THAT SARKIS' PROGRAM OF INTERNAL REFORM,
AS HE UNDERSTOOD IT, WAS PROMISING AND OUGHT TO BE BEGUN
ASAP.
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